

Whenever disaster strikes, you have to look hard to find the silver lining. Hurricane Frances tried hard to close down the Canton Senior Center, but even her tremendous fury could not destroy what everyone had worked so hard to achieve. The pictures taken on the first day of clean up after the storm tell the whole story; Frances destroyed only the material things. It is neither the building nor the contents that make a senior center; it is the laughter, the fun, the trust and the sense of fellowship that are the core ingredients of a real community. On that day with mud up to our ankles, wearing rubber gloves and boots, all age groups joined in to salvage what was salvageable. Looking back, as we were sitting on the grass eating our lunch, we laughed; we made new friends; we had fun; we came together as a community and formed new bonds that would in time move our center forward.

The clean up started at 9:00 that Friday morning. Young and old alike had come to help resurrect what at that point in time; everyone thought had been lost. The younger crowd did not have to come, school was out, they could have been doing their "fun" things; instead they chose to come and work hard to help the senior folks regain what they had lost. The older generation from Snug Harbor (retired Champion employees) had come to spend the day helping with the clean up. As the day started, there were two distinct groups; the teenagers were working on one part of the building while the senior group was cleaning on another. After a couple of hours the workforce had blended together with each person doing what they could to help each other. Some were shoveling debris into wheelbarrows as others were emptying them. On that day the generation gap was bridged, and a great appreciation for everyone's efforts had been achieved.

Stories about the "Great Flood of 1940" were told by those who remembered it, while tales of football games and "who's dating who" were heard from the younger crowd. Remarks were overheard like: "Today was just like going out on the football field on a Friday night, we worked hard, we played hard and in the end, we all were winners. That's what it's all about - helping others"; "The community was in a time of need and we felt working to clean up the senior center was the least that we could do"; "Working at the senior center made us feel appreciated and that we did just a little bit to help our community".

Reflecting back on that day, we realize that the Canton Senior Center is not about the building or the stuff in the building, it's about the people! The spirit of the Canton Senior Center is alive and well, although it may be temporarily being shared at a different location. We will soon be able to move back into a more permanent home, shake our fist at Hurricane Frances and let her know that even she could not destroy what so many people have come to depend on and have worked so hard to develop. Thanks to all who helped!

I had written this article for a local paper 9 - months ago. Since then most of the local businesses have reopened or relocated. However, the Canton Senior Center still remains without a home. At the center we serve a hot meal each day. Since the floods we have served approximately 2400 meals to local seniors. We have had a 35% increase from the previous year.

For some of the seniors the meal they receive at the center is the only hot meal they receive a day. The center is also the only interaction some of the seniors have with another person. I would like to ask you to imagine waking up each day of your life alone in your home, the phone does not ring all day, no one knocks at your door, and your body is so frail it is hard for you to fix a meal. If we did not have a senior center in Haywood County many seniors would live this life every day.

In the past 9-months we have been denied every request for funding to rebuild the Canton Senior Center. The only agency that has helped is United Way, \$4000.

I would like to ask why a rich nation would allow their elders to live their golden years alone?

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Frances and Ivan

Visit

Canton Senior Center













